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**Best Practices in Digital Branded Content for Generation Y:  
Developing Effective Campaigns in the New Era of Advertising**

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**Best Practices in Digital Branded Content for Generation Y:  
Developing Effective Campaigns in the New Era of Advertising**

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**Report**

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## **Abstract**

### **Best Practices in Digital Branded Content for Generation Y: Developing Effective Campaigns in the New Era of Advertising**

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The purpose of this document is to help marketing managers develop a deeper understanding of digital branded content and how it can be effectively targeted at Generation Y (i.e. consumers born between 1977 and 1994). Currently, the information available on digital branded content is scattered across a variety of sources, hence the need to aggregate key insights into digital branded content in one place. This document seeks to give marketing managers who are new to digital branded content an introductory look into this new form of advertising. Generation Y's anticipated increase in purchasing power makes them an important target market for brands. Due to Generation Y's constant use of technology, marketing managers must know how to target digital branded content at Generation Y. This document will define digital branded content and discuss its importance in the marketing mix, talk about Generation Y and their consumption patterns, highlight best practices in digital branded content as exhibited by several different organizations, and, finally, give several major recommendations for marketing managers who are interested in producing digital branded content for Generation Y.

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# **IS DIGITAL BRANDED CONTENT THE FUTURE OF ADVERTISING?**

## **Introduction**

How to effectively implement digital branded content through the various channels available online is something that most advertisers and businesses are currently grappling with when developing integrated communications campaigns. This has become even more crucial when developing campaigns that directly target Generation Y (i.e. consumers born between 1977 and 1994) due to the group's ever-increasing purchasing power in our society. With new technologies being developed almost daily, the task of developing digital branded content might seem daunting for organizations who have little experience developing digital content. However, organizations cannot ignore the need to include digital branded content in their campaigns as members of Generation Y have learned to expect it when visiting a brand's website.

## **Areas That This Paper Will Explore**

Based on new technologies, how important is it for organizations to have branded content on established interactive media channels, such as YouTube, mobile apps, and games, when targeting members of Generation Y? Have consumers come to expect more of a brand experience due to easier access to technological advances? Based on these ideas, how can the organization ensure that they are crafting persuasive messages for their audience, as opposed to using technology for the sake of using technology?

This report seeks to explore how brands can target members of Generation Y using digital branded content more effectively. The basics of digital branded content will be discussed, including the rules of developing effective branded content. Research on



Generation Y's consumption patterns will be presented in order to show why this demographic is important for advertisers in the coming years. Additionally, several best practices in digital branded content will be discussed so that marketers will have an idea of what works for this medium. Finally, a set of recommendations will be given in order to guide marketing managers before, during, and after a digital campaign. Ideally, this paper will serve as a guide for those who are just starting out on their journey in the realm of digital branded content.

## **ADVERTISING IN BRANDED CONTENT**

### **Digital Branded Content**

Digital branded content is a form of advertising that is produced using popular forms of entertainment media that consumers use on a regular basis. It includes video, mobile and web applications, music downloads, games, as well as other forms of interactive media that have been developed for use on devices that run an Internet browser. In other words, digital branded content is any digital form of media that is “intentional, brand-authored media used to establish or extend brand identity or affinity,” (Holloman 40). The key to digital branded content is that it is produced by an organization that is trying to reach their target audience in a less obtrusive way than traditional forms of advertising. The divide between advertising and entertainment is less apparent in digital branded content, which allows the user to develop their own meaning for the brand through the positive associations that they develop while interacting with the digital branded content. Digital branded content is an original form of communication and should provide a unique entertainment experience for the target.

Innovative technologies that have been developed in the last decade have made digital branded content a necessary component of digital campaigns. The ease at which consumers can access the Internet has made it an enticing medium through which advertisers can communicate with their target markets. Smart phones and tablet devices have made it even easier to reach consumers no matter where they are, which is why mobile digital branded content has become even more common. Mobile technology usage spans multiple generations, which is why marketers cannot ignore the importance of integrating digital branded content into their marketing plans regardless of who their target market is at the time of development.

While the task of developing high-quality digital branded content may seem overwhelming, organizations cannot ignore its importance in helping a brand remain relevant in the current media environment. Brands risk looking outdated in the eyes of their target market by not producing digital branded content both for their websites, as well as for smartphones and tablets.

### **The Shift Away From Traditional Advertising**

Because consumers have become increasingly skeptical of traditional advertising and the respective brand (The APA), organizations need to find a less intrusive way to promote their brand for their target audience. This is of even more importance with the savvy members of Generation Y, which creates a unique opportunity for organizations to integrate digital branded content into their campaigns. In doing so, the organization will look like an innovator in their industry, which will improve their image with the target market. Generation Y wants to be associated with anything that can be construed as innovative, including brands. This can be attributed to the importance that they place on how their peers view them. Brands should use this their advantage when planning their campaigns, as they will miss out on a chance to be seen as an innovator in the target's mind should they choose to ignore this opportunity.

Branded content is intended to be a more subtle way to communicate with the target audience about a brand. Through indirect methods, the organization is attempting to build a positive relationship between the brand and the target audience. Branded content is "blurring the line between entertainment and advertising in realms like movies, TV shows, songs, video games and online gaming," (Elliot). Essentially, branded content is meant to look less like a traditional advertisement and more like the forms of digital content that the target audience regularly seeks out for entertainment purposes. In order to

do this successfully, the brand must be able to write relevant content for the target, create stunning visuals, provide value for the target, and appropriately integrate the product into the branded content.

Generation Y is highly attuned to the latest developments in digital media, which is why brands must commit to developing high-quality campaigns that Generation Y will find relevant. Generation Y does not want to be patronized—they need to feel valued by the company that is communicating with them. For this reason, organizations must fully commit to developing campaigns that are well researched, visually appealing, and use the technology appropriately, not just for the sake of doing it. Generation Y will be able to tell when an organization is being disingenuous in their digital campaigns.

### **Rules for Successful Branded Content**

The Branded Content Marketing Association (BCMA) recently published a set of rules for the development of effective branded content. The BCMA is an organization that includes individual from different areas of advertising, brand development, sponsorship, media, broadcasting, programming and entertainment industries (Branded Content Marketing Association). The organization works to “promote and grow the branded content market to the wider audience,” (Branded Content Marketing Association). The organization recently published the Golden Rules of Successful Brand Content, which are:

- reactions to branded content are more positive than to traditional advertising,
- original, interesting branded content can impact positively on your brand,
- branded content can have a strong synergy with traditional advertising,
- the promotion of branded content can itself have a powerful impact on a brand,
- combined campaigns can be informative and emotive,

- branded content helps you to stand out from your competitors, and
- branded content is powerful—and with web support is even more powerful.

It is important for marketing managers to delve deeper into these rules in order to further understand how they fit into their organization's marketing communications plan. Digital branded content is here to stay and will only become more important for brands as larger portion of the population shifts from using traditional to digital media. Brands will be forced to flesh out their digital campaigns in order to reach consumers in a place where it makes the most sense to communicate with them. Because Generation Y can be referred to as digital natives, digital campaigns must be included in advertising that is specifically targeted at them. A deeper look into the BCMA's Golden Rules of Successful Branded Content will show how relevant this mode of communication is when communicating to members of our society, specifically those who make up Generation Y.

Due to the fact that reactions to branded content are more positive, it can be seen as a more credible form of communication in the eyes of consumers. Credibility and transparency have become increasingly important in our society, which views big businesses as being corrupt. If done properly, creating original branded content as a part of an organization's marketing plan can position the organization more positively in the minds of consumers.

It is important for brands to consider a shift to digital branded content when developing their marketing plans, however, it is equally as important for them to integrate it into their plan in such a way that the different mediums play off of each other in a logical way. Brands should consider how and if traditional advertising fits into their current advertising objectives, as well as how they should augment that form of advertising. Marketing managers should note that branded content can enhance other

forms of marketing communication that their company employs as it creates more opportunities for their target audience to connect with the brand. A new branded content campaign in the digital realm itself is newsworthy and can bring positive attention to the brand.

Digital branded content allows the brand to be more creative with the imagery that it uses. Using video and other digital forms of storytelling allows the brand to set themselves apart from their competition by occupying a new place in the target's mind. The opportunities for digital branded content are seemingly endless. Brands can use various combinations of media to create meaningful campaigns for the target audience. While all signs point to branded content as the future of advertising, how does this relate to an individual organization? Furthermore, many organizations are working on how to best communicate with Generation Y due to the fact that they consume media unlike previous generations (Williams). These organizations understand the importance that Generation Y plays in the future success of their brand.

Due to the implementation of the BCMA's rules and the constant technological changes in the digital realm, it is important for organizations to stay ahead of the curve in order to remain relevant in the minds of consumers. What is relevant one day can become obsolete the next day.

### **Goals and Objectives of Digital Branded Content**

The goals of branded content all relate to the importance of creating a meaningful and lasting relationship between the brand and the consumer. The overarching goal of creating this meaningful brand experience specifically for Generation Y can be achieved through digital branded content. Digital branded content is a way to interact with Generation Y audience members in a way that they want to receive branded

communication. The brand can provide more value for the target audience and feel more confident that they are listening by communicating with them in this manner.

According to a survey by the BCMA, consumers prefer an innovative approach to being advertised to about a product, brand, or service compared to traditional advertising (The APA), which is important to remember when targeting Generation Y, a group that always seems to be ahead of the pack in terms of technology. Due to constant technological innovations, it is safe to assume that there is a multitude of innovative ways to communicate with Generation Y.

Another goal of branded content is to create a product that is buzzworthy. By doing this, the brand is increasing the likelihood that word-of-mouth advertising will increase the lifespan of the content. Having the endorsement of one member of the target's age group will increase the credibility of the content. This even truer for members of Generation Y due to how social they are in their media consumption patterns.

Finally, the organization wants to encourage the target to seek out more information about the brand. While the branded content should not be strictly informational, it should direct the target back to the organization's website, Facebook, and other social media pages in order to learn more about the brand. If the organization is able to induce this kind of behavior, there is an increased chance that they have created a meaningful and lasting relationship with the intended target.

### **Key Considerations for Marketing Managers**

When communicating with Generation Y, the organization needs to identify how the target wants organizations to communicate with them. This is important for creating a meaningful brand experience with the target. What has worked for previous generations

will not necessarily work in the same way for Generation Y. By ignoring these changes in preferences, brands risk becoming obsolete in the eyes of an increasingly important segment of the market. This will be disastrous for the brand and its future success.

The organization also needs to appropriately use these technologies for the message that they are trying to distribute and for the desired reaction that they want. This will ensure that the target understands what the brand is about and that the brand is relevant to their lives. The best way to determine how to implement a digital campaign for Generation Y is through careful research of technological innovations and the target market, as well as an extensive competitive analysis.

How do these ideas relate? By reaching Generation Y where they want to be reached in an appropriate way, the organization can ensure that the target develops a deeper understanding of the brand and their associated products, which will help to ensure that the brand remains relevant in the years to come.

How should organizations measure the effectiveness of branded content in relation to their overall marketing strategies? Because branded content is an emerging form of advertisement, many companies might be skeptical of how much impact it has when marketing to Generation Y. This is why the BCMA developed the Branded Content Evaluation System (BCES), which can be used by media agencies, creative agencies, production companies and media owners. (Branded Content Marketing Association). The BCES recommends gathering data on:

- how the branded content campaign is performing against key brand metrics, allowing organizations to determine the ROI,
- which elements of the campaign are performing the most strongly in meeting the campaign objectives, and



- what the organization can do differently to support the campaign more strongly to optimize its ROI.

It is important for the brand to determine if their efforts are paying off based on the goals that they defined for the campaign. Developing digital branded content is costly and time consuming, so measuring campaign effectiveness is imperative. If the campaign is not helping the brand reach its previously defined goals, then the company is wasting its money and chance of future success. During the analysis of the campaign's effectiveness, the brand should assess what aspects of the campaign worked and which ones did not based on the goals that were defined for the campaign. This will allow them to stop wasting time and resources on strategies that did not work while further developing the elements of the campaign that have proven to be effective.

## **GENERATION Y**

When choosing which segments of the population to target, an organization has many things to consider, such as who will benefit most from using the product, who will want to use this product, and how can the organization best market the product to that segment. Regardless of which segment an organization chooses to target, it must consider the potential target's background, personality traits, their value to the business, and their media consumption patterns when developing a product and the related campaign. If it makes sense to target Generation Y, then an organization has made a wise decision in ensuring future success of their product.

### **Background**

Generation Y, the children of Baby Boomers, can be defined as those born between 1977 and 1994. There are 80 million members of this segment of the population and they are expected to dominate the population by 2014 (Esser). Because Generation Y comprises such a large portion of the population, they are an important segment to consider when making marketing decisions because of the high purchasing power they currently hold and will continue to hold in the future.

### **Personality Traits**

The members of Generation Y want to know that they hold a greater purpose within society. They are image-driven and they care about what their peers think about their consumption choices. (Williams). Additionally, they have a strong desire to make the world a better place (Esser). Generation Y is also characterized by a need for instant gratification (Eisner), a strong desire for self-realization, and a high propensity to maximize current opportunities and enjoy life (Parment 52).

A larger section of Generation Y is young enough that their values and opinions on life and how they see the world are still developing. This is an ideal time for marketers to create a need for their products among members of the target market. It is easier to create a need for a product as opposed to changing a habit that has been cultivated over several years.

### **Generation Y and Businesses**

As of 2007, Generation Y accounted for 170 billion spendable dollars (Esser). This number will only increase as more members of Generation Y enter the workforce and can be expected to make even more expensive purchasing choices as they enter new stages over the course of their lives.

Generation Y's personal and professional lives are starting to converge in a way unlike any previous generations' (Esser). They are always "connected," which essentially means that they can always be reached, which organizations should capitalize on if they hope to remain relevant with this demographic.

### **Generation Y's Media Consumption**

The ease at which members of Generation Y use modern technology creates a unique communication opportunity for businesses that are trying to attract Generation Y customers. However, those who are in charge of making strategic marketing decisions might not fully understand these technologies or the impact that these new technologies have on their target market.

Due to the complex media environment that Generation Y became accustomed to while growing up, they are used to having many choices and are not as overwhelmed by them as previous generations. Generation Y is the first generation to grow up with the Internet around them (Parment 31), which is why they understand this medium more

intuitively than all preceding generations. Generation Y enjoys having choices (Parment, 127), which can be attributed the fact that modern media is so diverse and allows consumers to have an ever-increasing number of choices (See Figure 1).

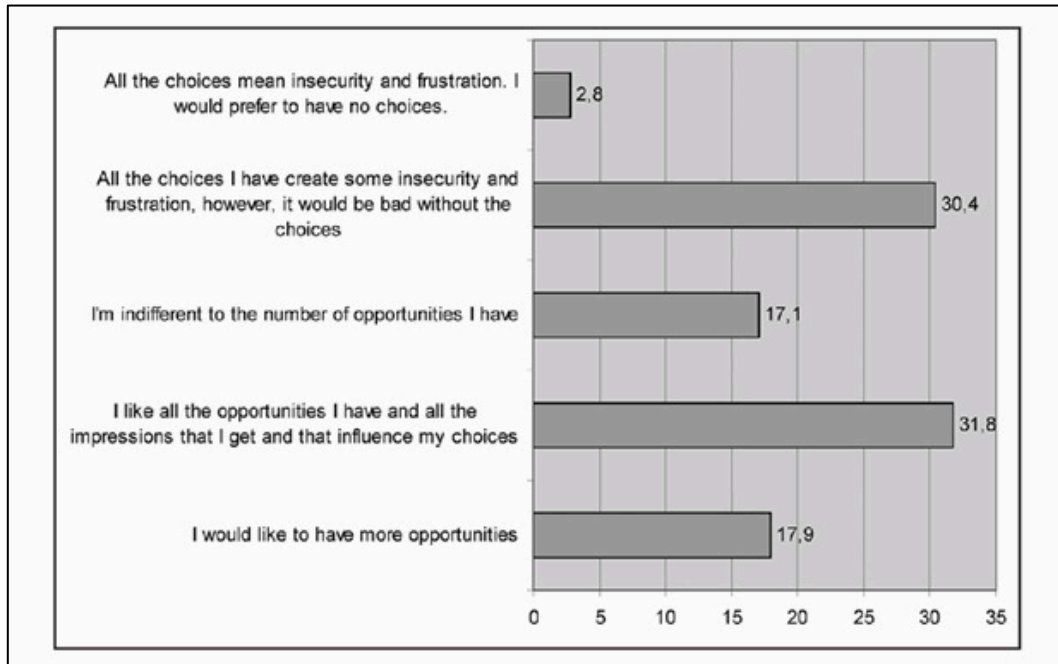


Figure 1: Generation Y Prefers to Have Choices. Figures in Percent.  
Source: *Generation Y in Consumer and Labor Markets*, Anders Parment, 2011.

Because of Generation Y's more social tendencies, word-of-mouth advertising is increasingly important (Williams). Additionally, they want their Internet experience to be interactive, but the content must be relevant to their media consumption (Williams). For Generation Y, digital media are "trouncing" traditional channels and are still increasing in popularity, which is why brands that underinvest in digital communications risk decreasing in relevance with this segment, which is also the United States' largest consumer group (Galloway). Eighty-one percent of L2 survey respondents access Facebook daily, 45 percent read blogs and newspapers daily, 44 percent watch television

daily, 5 percent access newspaper content online, 25 percent use mobile to access social media websites, and 63 percent use social media to engage with brands (Galloway). These figures show what media channels Generation Y values and which media channels businesses should value when developing integrated communications plans that are targeted at Generation Y.

Generation Y sees branding as “something natural,” which can be attributed to the brand name becoming more important than the actual client. Branding occurs where it was previously seen as unnecessary, including with student associations, university campuses, and educational institutions (Parment 57). Generation Y views intangible characteristics as normal as tangible characteristics. This includes intellectual, artistic, and emotional aspects of brands (Parment 58). When marketing products, intangible aspects of a brand should also be considered just as important as the tangible aspects.

Consistency in messaging and brand identity is also of high importance to members of Generation Y. They do not like discrepancies between marketing communication and what is actually going on with the company. This generation is very attuned to inconsistencies between what an organization claims and the reality of the situation (Parment 81). Brands risk ruining their reputation with this group if they do not represent their company in a truthful manner.

Brands should further consider the ability to develop meaningful relationships with members of Generation Y through Facebook due to the fact that most brand pages garner more followers than the circulation of the *New York Times* (Galloway). Generation Y is very brand conscious and is ready to interact with brands online, including receiving deals from them through social media websites. Generation Y’s willingness to interact with brands creates a great opportunity for companies to foster meaningful, long-term relationships with this increasingly important segment of the population.

## **Generation Y and the Future**

Generation Y and their influence will dominate the consumer market for many years to come, which is why organizations must act now and decide how best to target these individuals in order create effective products and campaigns. Marketers can no longer pretend that digital content is not a required component of their marketing mix. The forms of media that Generation Y uses are not going away, either. In fact, they are only going to become more complex with each subsequent generation, which is why marketers must stay on top of emerging digital technologies so as to appropriately target this increasingly important segment of the population.

## **DIGITAL BRANDED CONTENT IN PRACTICE**

Seeing digital branded content in practice is an ideal way for marketers to increase their working knowledge of this form of advertising. Even though there are a wide variety of technologies available with which one can develop digital branded content, finding the best ones poses a problem for those who are developing these campaigns. Organizations must find a way to implement these logically for their product's industry, and their target market. There is no magical formula for developing an effective digital campaign, but studying how other organizations are developing their campaigns is a recommended practice that will allow marketing managers to discover what technologies exist and how they are being implemented.

The following are a few examples of effective digital branded content that have been produced recently. The forms of digital branded content include a short film, video interviews, digital downloads, playlists, mobile apps, and advergames, and have been implemented by a varied set of organizations. The Creators Project, Old Spice, Target, Expedia, and Nike+ Fuelband campaigns target various segments of Generation Y and all have different organizational goals, which inform their choice of medium and their marketing mix when developing their digital branded content campaigns.

### **Best Practices: The Creators Project**

The Creators Project (<http://www.thecreatorsproject.com>) was created through a partnership between Intel and VICE and supports artists across a variety of disciplines that use technology in their artwork, including gaming, design, and music. The Creators Project showcases these artists' work across a variety of digital channels that are effectively integrated into their website. The wide variety of content that is available on this website makes it a place that members of Generation Y would want to return to after

their initial visit in order to see what new content has been added. The creators of this website and its related content planned out how this website would be set up so as to employ the current technologies in digital content in a meaningful and functional way for their target audience.

The Creators Project website prompts the user to subscribe to their YouTube channel upon initially visiting the website. The dialog box tells them what they will find on the channel so that they aren't surprised when they click on the link and are rerouted to the brand's YouTube page. This is a great way to pull people over to outside website because it tells them exactly what they are going to find there. Upon visiting their YouTube channel, users will find a channel that has been fully populated (see Appendix). This tells the user that there is meaningful content on the website and that they have not wasted their time by visiting a different website. Users will see popular videos, including work from critically acclaimed movies, playlists that are categorized into six groups, and links to their other social media websites. All of this is in addition to a visually appealing background that the developers clearly put time and effort into developing. The videos tab has videos covering the creators, more information on the studios, the projects on the website, and events (see Appendix). Visitors can browse by various categories, including country of origin, category, popularity, and user recommendations. The information is not only easy to access based on the traditional standards of website design, but it is also brimming with relevant content for the user. The combination of these two elements creates a meaningful experience for the user and is more likely to encourage them want to return to the website.

The homepage of the website invites the user to visit their Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and StumbleUpon pages, links to their RSS feed, contains information on events and top news, and includes an opportunity to learn more about their apps. The project's



apps are available on the iPhone, iPad, Roku player, and Boxee box. Internet users have not only come to expect organizations to have a variety of apps, but also information on where to find the apps, so it is imperative that websites make this information as easily accessible as The Creators Project has done.

The project's recent blog posts are prominently displayed on the home page, so that return visitors can see what is currently relevant to the organization and new visitors can see that the organization has a blog with useful information for the user to read about. The content on the blog is directly relevant to the organization's purpose and it is interesting enough for readers to want to return to see what else has been posted on the blog. This is important when developing a blog for an organization. The content must be compelling enough to visitors so that they come back. The blog appropriately supplements the company's digital branded content and gives the user a reason to stay on the website after viewing the digital content.

The Creators Project has their own playlist that consists of work from indie artists that visitors can play directly from the website (see Appendix). This is a very innovative addition to the website. It is clear that the playlist is updated on a regular basis because the songs and artists are currently very popular on the indie music scene. Because the target audience of the organization listens to this genre of music, it is an excellent idea to include it on the website. This allows visitors to create more positive associations with the brand through some of their current favorite songs.

The best way to keep visitors on a website is to make it visually appealing and user-friendly and the design of this website achieves that through high-quality design work. The website effectively uses white space in order to avoid looking cluttered. All of the screenshots of the videos are intriguing to the visitors, which invites the user to click

the play video icon. Even though the website is rich in content, the user never feels overwhelmed due to the spacing of the elements on each page and the simplistic design.

The key to this cross-platform campaign is consistency. Images and videos are consistent across the website, mobile apps, the YouTube channel and other social media pages, such as their Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and Pinterest. The Facebook page even allows visitors to subscribe to their YouTube channel. The consistent messaging allows users to get an accurate understanding of what the organization is about and how it would fit into their lives. The user does not have a question as to what the organization is about after visiting the website.

By developing interesting content for the user, making it easy to access, and keeping the message of the organization consistent across platforms, The Creators Project has developed a sustainable website that will bring visitors back to check out the new content. This is a well-executed digital campaign that others should take notice of when planning their next digital endeavor.

### **Best Practices: Old Spice**

Old Spice is an example of an older brand that needed a repositioning suitable for a younger target market. The brand had to reevaluate what age group of the male population to target as their current customer base started to age. In order to remain relevant, the company has to change their target market to Generation Y males. The brand's use of digital content has been well received among not only the target market, but also the population at large, which says a lot about the quality of the content produced.

The organization of the brand's website is broken up so that users can easily find the branded content, but also find out more about the products, as well as where users can

purchase the products. The overall tone of the website is very quirky and humorous, which appeals to the target market of Generation Y males. Their digital content includes videos that are available on the website and on the company's YouTube channel (see Appendix), downloads, as well as Facebook and Twitter pages. Not only are the brand's popular commercials available on the website, there are additional videos available for the user. This gives a person who visits the company's website after viewing a commercial a reason to stay on the website. Giving them something new will keep them on the website and bring them back. The user will develop more positive associations for the website because of the high-quality, humorous content that the brand has made available to visitors. The brand's YouTube channel contains all of these videos and is organized by campaign. Having the brand's past campaigns available on their YouTube channel allows the user to see all of their favorite commercials, as well as new ones that they could potentially enjoy. The theme of the page is consistent with that of the website: a gold and red background.

The company's Facebook and Twitter pages include humorous posts with links to images on their Instagram feed. These posts are appropriately aligned with the brand's quirky image. Their humorous posts draw the visitor to the brand's other pages where they can find out more information about the brand and their products. Additionally, Old Spice uses celebrity endorsements as a way to bring attention to their website and social media pages. The brand's social media pages are important because they drive users to the digital branded content.

The design of the website fits in with the brand's overall strategy of providing a product that had typically been associated with an older male demographic, but has been repurposed in a quirky way so as to be attractive to the younger male population. Old Spice is simultaneously poking fun at its origins while getting the word out about their

products. All of their digital media fits in with the humorous take on the benefits of Old Spice.

By appropriately using the digital channels employed in this campaign, Old Spice is able to get their message out to their target market. The brand keeps their messaging consistent across channels so as to avoid confusion over what they are about among the target market. Because of these factors, Old Spice has turned itself into a relevant brand for Generation Y males.

### **Best Practices: Target's "Falling for You" Video**

In the Fall of 2012, Target released a short film called "Falling for You" (<http://fallingforyou.target.com>), which features major television and film stars wearing some of the brand's more stylish clothing and using other items that Target sells (see Appendix). Throughout the film, a panel on the right of the video is constantly updated with links to the Target items that are in that scene so that the viewer can purchase them instantly (see Appendix). Below the video, audience members can scroll through all of the items featured in the video. They can add items to their favorites on that website (see Appendix), or pin them to one of their boards on Pinterest. The page also prompts the viewer to follow Target Style on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

This is an example of a high-quality branded short film that was developed appropriately for the products being sold and for the target market: the older subset of Generation Y. The video features a well-known actress, Kristen Bell, as well as two other moderately well-known actors, Nia Long and Zachary Ansel, wearing the brand's more stylish clothes. The clothes look very flattering on the actors and give the impression that the actors might wear them in their daily lives. The viewer sees actors that they are familiar with wearing affordable clothing that the user can buy at their local Target,

which elevates Target's status and potentially the viewer's should they choose to purchase the items featured in the videos. The video communicates that these clothes are both stylish and reasonably priced, which is what Target has always promoted itself as in their prior campaigns. It is important that brands stay true to their brand identity and stay authentic when developing digital branded content.

Another key element of these films is the ability to immediately purchase the clothes and other items featured. This is important because it eliminates several steps that prevent people from finding the styles that their favorite celebrities are wearing and purchasing them. The viewer does not have to go online and spend time searching for the clothes that a celebrity wore. They know exactly who is selling the clothes and where to buy them. The ease at which the user can purchase the item creates a positive brand experience for the user that they are sure to talk about with their friends, be it online or in person.

Another function of this website that is geared for members of Generation Y is the ability to share their favorite items on Facebook, Twitter, and Pinterest. This appeals to the targets need for social interaction and acceptance from peer groups. Additionally, it promotes the brand, their products, and the short film. While this is standard on most websites, brands should not forget how important it is in generating word-of-mouth advertising and pass-a-long readership.

Developing a high-quality film that allows the viewer to immediately purchase the items that are worn or used in the film is an effective way for a company to implement a digital branded content campaign. It allows the viewer to act upon their desires as soon as they see something that they want to purchase. If a brand does not include an outlet for the viewer to behave in a desired way, then they have wasted large amounts of money and time developing content that serves no purpose. It is easy to tell

when a company is developing content for the sake of doing it and not to strategically achieve their marketing goals.

### **Best Practices: Expedia's Tag Me if You Can YouTube Game**

In 2012, Expedia launched a YouTube contest in Australia and New Zealand called “Tag Me If You Can” (<http://www.expedia.com.au/p/tagme>) where users guess where local surf celebrity Nathan Jolliffe is in his international travels, which span 15 locations. Jolliffe gives players clues about where he is and users must guess where he is in order to win a share of the \$150,000 cash prize. Users would access the videos and play the game on the company's website, as well as interact with the game through Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. This allowed users to tell their friends about the game, which also spread the word about Expedia and the game.

This is an effective way to entice users to interact with the brand and it makes sense for reaching the target market. The videos that were produced for this campaign are high quality and the tagging function is visually consistent with the iconography used on geo-tagging apps and websites (see Appendix). Using Jolliffe as the host of the videos makes sense because he is a celebrity in the minds of the target market. His surfing background fits with the adventure-seeking tone of the contest. The segment of Generation Y that Expedia is targeting enjoys traveling to various exotic locations around the world. This game challenges their knowledge of these places. Additionally, the game makes sense for Expedia, which is a travel booking organization. Integrating an actual travel component into their digital branded content reinforces the brand's services to those who play the game. While it may have made more sense to give the winners trips to the places showcased, there are many hurdles associated with coordinating 15

international trips. Because members of the target market are younger, they might prefer to have cash in hand and spend it as they choose.

Even though the game is currently over, the Facebook and Twitter pages for the brand are still operational and regularly post related content (see Appendix). Those who started to follow the brand when the game was running will still be able to interact with the brand and find out when it is running a similar contest in the future. Additionally, the brand has archived all of the videos from the contest on its YouTube channel playlist. Visitors can also view the brand's other video campaigns, as well as view the other Expedia channels. It is important that a brand does not forget about the fans that it gained during a contest that has ended. Expedia has not only created a high-quality video campaign, but they have also provided a way for players to relive the experience that they had during the contest.

### **Best Practices: Nike+ Fuelband**

The Nike+ Fuelband ([http://www.nike.com/us/en\\_us/lp/nikeplusfuelband](http://www.nike.com/us/en_us/lp/nikeplusfuelband)) tracks users' daily activity, such as running, walking, basketball, dancing, and other physical activities and catalogs them on their mobile and web applications. The user connects the iPhone app to their previously purchased Nike+ Fuelband in order to set up the system and begin tracking their physical activity. The app allows the user to work toward achieving their fitness goals in a more efficient manner because it lets the user to see what activities were more efficient than others. The target audience for the Nike+ Fuelband is members of Generation Y, The imagery on the website is appealing to the target on both a broad and a specific level. There is content targeted at men and women of varying levels of athletic ability, which creates an inclusive image for the brand. This

is an effective strategy because members of Generation Y want to feel unique and able to express their individuality in facets of their lives.

The app uses an attractive interface that shows the user's progress towards reaching their goal and what they can do to improve (see Appendix). The user can set goals, track their progress, receive rewards for meeting goals, and share their progress on social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, and Path.

The Nike+ Fuelband website features images and screenshots of the app itself. There are instructional videos that tell the visitor what the product does and how it can fit into their lives before they even purchase the Fuelband. This will help minimize the amount of dissonance that the user may feel after purchasing the Fuelband. The social aspect of the app allows users to share their progress with their friends and family members, which appeals to members of Generation Y because they are constantly seeking approval from their peers—even while exercising. The bottom of the webpage included attractive images that represent postings on the Fuelband's Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube pages (see Appendix).

The videos featured on the website are full of high-energy clips that are meant to motivate the viewer to go out and exercise with the Nike+ Fuelband. In one video, action clips from famous movies are used to show that everyone exercises in some way that is meaningful for them (see Appendix). These videos show that exercise can be a unique experience for the individual, which is ideal for Generation Y because of the importance that they place on individuality. The only major flaw in their video links is that they link to the individual video page. The YouTube videos that are listed on the website should link directly to Nike's YouTube channel, not the individual video page.

The Nike+ Fuelband integrates their target market's love of exercise, facility with technology, and their need for individuality into a unique app that their target will enjoy



using. The positive feelings towards Nike that the user develops after purchasing the Fuelband will extend to other parts of their athletic gear purchases and will help to make them loyal Nike customers.

### **Insights From Best Practices in Digital Branded Content**

All five examples of effective digital branded content highlight lessons that marketers should take note of when developing digital branded content. Developing high-quality content, creating a YouTube channel for videos, including an aspirational element around the product in the digital content, showing the product in action, and allowing the target to interact with the brand are all key insights gathered from these examples.

Once a brand decides to develop digital branded content to promote their product, brand, or service, it is important that it develops content that is of the highest quality for that medium. It will be clear when the brand did not make this a priority when developing the content. All five brands developed high-quality content across all forms of media used in their campaigns, especially Target's "Falling for You" web series, which can be seen in their effective use of well-known celebrities and the high-quality production value.

If a brand decides to develop branded video content, then it is imperative that they create a YouTube channel and populate it with their videos and link it to their social media profile pages. The YouTube channels should be organized by the implementation of video playlists so that the user can easily access older content. The brand must commit to developing new video content on a regular basis, which allows them to look innovative in the eyes of their target market. The Creators Project does an excellent job of updating their video pages with exciting new content and doing cross-platform promotion of the

videos, which is also a necessary component of the development and promotion of these videos.

The digital branded content that an organization develops should also have an aspirational element to it while still promoting the attainability of the lifestyle associated with the product or brand. The mediums through which digital content can be developed allow for the use of visuals that show the user what their life can be like when using these products. The “Falling for You” videos by Target epitomize this idea: many people want to dress just like their favorite celebrities. These videos allow them to do just that.

Digital branded content needs to show the product in action or the effects of the product in any form of media that the brand chooses to utilize. This will allow the user to imagine using the product in their lives. The Nike+ Fuelband uses videos to show how the Fuelband can fit into the viewers’ lives.

Digital branded content can also be a way for the user to interact with the brand without actually using the product. The Expedia “Tag Me If You Can” game and Old Spices’ downloads let the user find indirect ways to build positive brand associations before they even purchase the brand’s products. This increases the chance that the user will purchase the brand’s products the next time that they are in the market for the particular products that the brand produces.

These examples are just a few of the various ways that brands can develop digital branded content that will strengthen the bond that they have with consumers. Marketing managers must not forget to evaluate their organizational goals and who their target is when developing their digital branded content.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the research set forth in this document, the following recommendations have been developed to guide companies when creating branded content to communicate with Generation Y. By adhering to these guidelines, organizations can ensure that their campaign will reach their target market in an appropriate way, which will help to ensure future success. There are nine insights, including information on creating relevant content for the target market, integrating the content with the brand's traditional advertising campaign, how to interact with the target, and how to measure for campaign effectiveness.

### **Create Relevant Content for the Target Audience**

Regardless of whom a brand is targeting, it is important that they develop relevant content for the target audience in order for the content to be meaningful to them. If the target audience does not see how the information is relevant to their lives, they will focus on something else that is more interesting, which may be content that is developed by a competitor. Branded content must communicate with Generation Y using the language that they use, but it must be done correctly. Members of Generation Y are very aware of advertising that is using their language in order to seem as if they relate to the target when they clearly do not. This segment does not want other to patronize them when in any form of advertising.

Generation Y also wants to feel like they see something of themselves in the branded content that they consume due to their social nature that drives their need to belong. For Generation Y, there is no incentive to pay attention to something that is not personally relevant because they have so many options to choose from when they are online. It is important for brands to do further research on the sub-segment that they are

targeting to further understand the language that they use and their values. This will affect both the media that they use to develop their content and how they use it.

If a company does not find a way to make their brand look personally relevant in a way that makes sense to the target, then they run the risk of being dismissed by the target. The target might take their business to a competitor if the competitor seems like they understand the target more. The target will think that their products will probably suit their needs more than a competitor's product.

### **Use the Medium Appropriately**

Choosing to develop digital branded content is not a task that should be taken upon lightly. In order to develop a high-quality product, those developing the product must invest a lot of time, effort, and money. The individual products of the campaign must be innovative, but their use and content must make sense for the scope of the campaign.

When selecting the medium that a brand plans on using for its branded content campaign, the marketing manager must determine what medium makes sense for their brand's product and the target. They must ask themselves what form of communication will showcase the product or brand the best. After that, they need to decide how to present themselves and their product within the chosen medium. This will ensure that the target receives a complete picture of what the brand has to offer.

The marketing manager must do research on new technologies so that they can continue to develop buzzworthy content for their target audience. What seemed innovative 4 years ago is no longer as exciting as it was when it first came out. It might even be seen as a standard part of a campaign. When it comes to Generation Y, a brand cannot afford to seem as if they are behind the times. Using a technology that is seen as outdated will not work when communicating with image-conscious Generation Y.

A company is more likely to keep members of Generation Y engaged with their content and, hopefully, their brand by using the mediums employed in their branded content appropriately. The Internet provides too much rich content for those with such low attention spans to stay in one place for too long, especially if the content is not developed properly.

### **Integrate With Traditional Advertising**

Traditional advertising has seen its numbers drop in recent years, both in its frequency of use and the amount of money spent on it. This can be attributed to the Internet and its ability to target audiences more efficiently. Additionally, the Internet allows brands to develop rich digital content for their consumers. For these reasons, marketing managers might consider eliminating the traditional advertising that they have typically included in their past campaigns targeting Generation Y. However, they should not necessarily eliminate traditional advertising from their marketing mix entirely, they should be more calculated in how they plan and budget for their campaigns. Marketing managers should reevaluate where they spend their traditional advertising dollars so that they are reaching the target where they consume traditional media the most.

Marketing managers should ensure that both their traditional advertising campaigns and their digital branded content complement each other. The traditional advertising should promote the digital branded content or send the viewer to the website where they can interact with the branded content. The branded content must deliver on the promises made by the traditional advertising or else the audience will see no reason to buy what the brand is promoting or interact with the brand in the future.

If done correctly, traditional advertising and branded content can work together seamlessly to achieve the brand's marketing goals and add synergy. This requires careful planning, as well as effective use of the diverse mediums involved.

## **Listen to the Audience Members**

It has become commonplace for websites to have areas for users to post feedback about the brand or the products it produces on their various webpages, including their website, social media pages, and blogs. Not including a comment section on these pages will look suspicious to users and it will make them feel as if their opinions are not valued. Members of Generation Y want to express their opinion and they want to be heard, so brands risk alienating their target market if they do not allow this key segment of the population to have an outlet for their thoughts on the brand.

It is not enough for a brand to allow their audience members to post their thoughts and opinions to the brand's websites, they must also respond to those who write to the brand by either making the proposed changes or corresponding with the writer about why the proposed changes are not currently feasible. This is a important and time-consuming task, which can be accomplished by individuals who are hired specifically to correspond with those who comment on a brand's website.

## **Let the Target Create Their Own Meaning**

Generation Y is highly independent and doesn't want to be told what to think, which is why brands should develop content that allows audience members to find their own meaning within the content. In doing this, the brand allows Generation Y to find out how the brand fits into their lives. Generation Y wants to feel as if they have discovered something of their own. Digital branded content should not tell them exactly how something should be used, but should highlight the fact that there are endless possibilities when using their products. Brands need to challenge Generation Y to use the product in a surprising way. Members of Generation Y will find a way to make the brand and their product their own, which is more likely to ensure that they have a long-lasting relationship with the brand. If the user sees something of themselves in the product, they

will be less likely to switch brands or stop using that kind of product all together. Doing so would mean that they are giving up a part of their identity, too.

Brands can achieve this by encouraging users to develop their own content and submit it to the brand's website for other users to see. In essence, the user is making themselves a part of the branded content.

### **Keep the Audience Engaged**

The brand must always focus on how to keep the target engaged with their digital content. Creating dull content defeats the purpose of advertising through these mediums. The content should include ways for the audience members to interact with the content while they are viewing it. Once the audience knows that they can count on the brand for engaging content, they are more inclined to return to the brand's website to see what new content the brand has developed. This will create a positive image for the brand and their products.

One way that brands can engage their audience is by developing engaging advergames that users can access from their phones or computers. This way, users can interact with the brand wherever they are, increasing the number of positive interactions between the brand and the user.

### **Tell Them Where They Can Learn More**

Branded content should be integrated with the brand's main website and social media pages in a way that makes sense for the type of product being sold and the type of digital content that is being utilized. One form of digital branded content cannot communicate everything about a company or the products that it sells, nor should it. Users need to know where they can go to learn more so that they can make a more informed purchasing decision. This fulfills Generation Y's need for instant gratification because it allows them to find out more about the company instantly and act on their

desires as quickly as they choose. The absence of a website or other common social media pages will be a glaring mistake to members of Generation Y, so businesses should not have a spotty web presence.

### **Let the Target Interact With Their Peers**

Generation Y is more social than any of the preceding generations. They want their peers to know what they are doing and they seek their peers' approval in almost everything that they do. For this reason, brands need to appropriately integrate social media into their digital branded content. Not only will this promote the content to a wider audience, but it will also satisfy the target's need to seek approval from their peers. By fulfilling Generation Y's need for social interaction, the brand is developing a strong relationship between itself and the target market. This further benefits the company because it increases the amount of peer endorsements through word-of-mouth advertising, which increases the likelihood that new members of Generation Y will take interest in the brand.

### **Compare Results to Campaign Goals**

It is necessary for organizations to constantly compare the results of their campaign to organizational goals, both short-term and long-term, as well as to industry results. Using the Branded Content Evaluation System that was discussed earlier in the document will allow the organization to determine whether or not the campaign is working and will help them to make adjustments to the campaign in order to ensure future success for the organization. In an agency setting, the account executive would be the ideal person to take the lead on running the BCES, as they are more involved with the brand and the campaign's goals. During the preliminary planning stages of the campaign, a timeline should be developed that lists key dates for when the brand should evaluate campaign effectiveness. The account executive should monitor what is being said about



the campaign on a daily basis, but should give the campaign time to run before measuring against metrics, such as ROI. The brand should give the campaign approximately 3 months to run and take effect with the target market before it looks to measure overall effectiveness. This larger evaluation should also occur simultaneously with an evaluation of all of the brand's marketing efforts so that the brand can see how the digital branded content is fitting in with the brand's overall marketing mix. Marketing managers cannot ascertain whether or not their campaign is successful if they do not compare the results of the campaign to predetermined campaign goals.

## **CONCLUSION**

Even though many companies have not tested the waters of this new form of advertising, organizations should not ignore the impact that branded content has on reaching Generation Y. Marketers must reach this segment where they are, which is online. Marketers still have the opportunity to become innovators in branded content campaigns due to the fact that this kind of advertising is still in its infancy.

As this document stated, Generation Y is set to become the most influential segment of the market in the next few years, which is why marketers cannot ignore their media consumption patterns. These individuals are keenly aware of when a brand has developed content that is subpar. Marketers must acclimate themselves to these new forms of technology quickly because the next generation of digital natives will begin to dominate the market soon. These individuals see digital technologies as a normal part of life even more so than the older members of Generation Y. Marketers must fine-tune their digital branded content strategies now so as to have experience with the related mediums by the time that the next generation holds the largest share of purchasing power.

By following these recommendations, including creating relevant content for the target market, integrating the content with the brand's traditional advertising campaign, interacting with the target, and measuring for campaign effectiveness, the organization can start to develop branded content that is both entertaining and relevant to Generation Y and subsequent generations of digital natives. The speed at which these technologies change requires marketers to constantly stay on top of digital technological innovations if they hope to remain relevant in the eyes of the target market. Recent market history is full of examples of brands that did not change with the new technological developments and suffered because of it. A company that embraces these new forms of technology and

implements them effectively decreases the likelihood that they, too, will become irrelevant in the eyes of their target market.

## Appendix

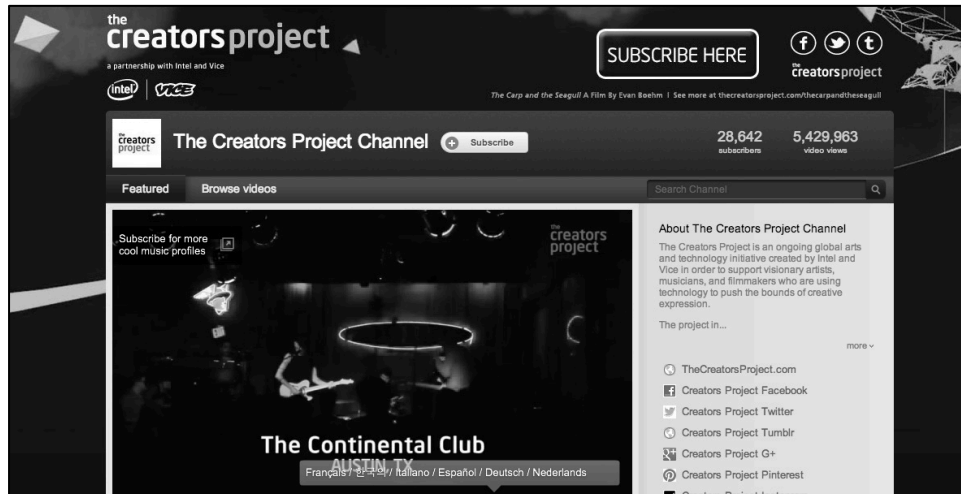


Figure 2: The Creators Project YouTube Channel  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/user/TheCreatorsProject>

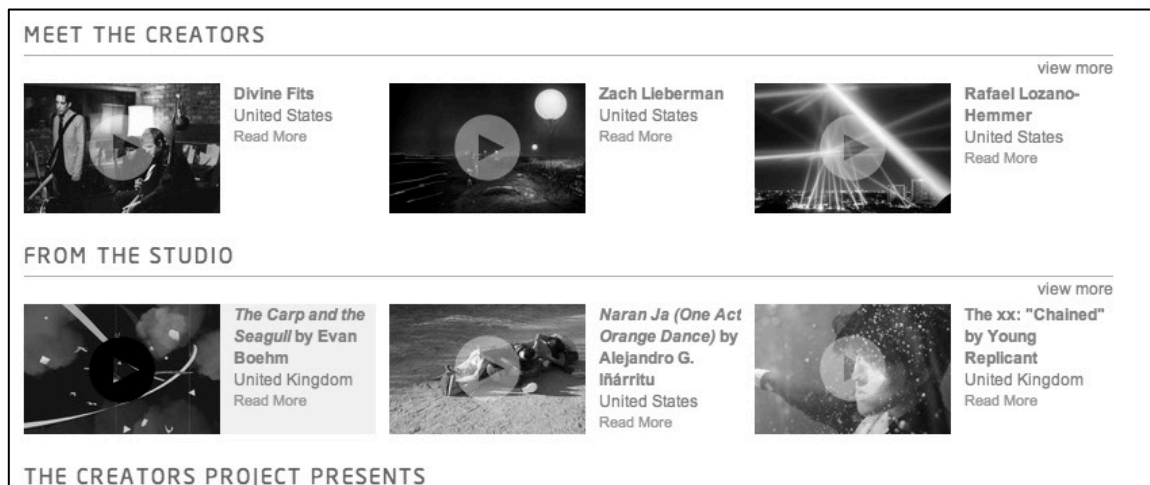


Figure 3: The Creators Project Website Video Tab  
Source: <http://thecreatorsproject.com/videos>

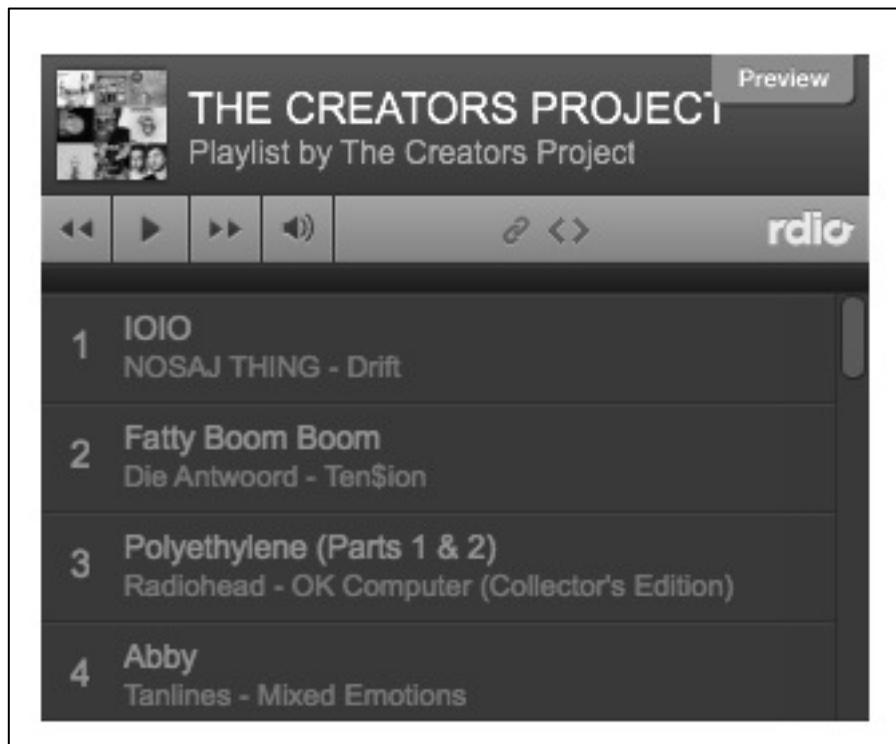


Figure 4: The Creators Project Playlist  
Source: <http://thecreatorsproject.com/>

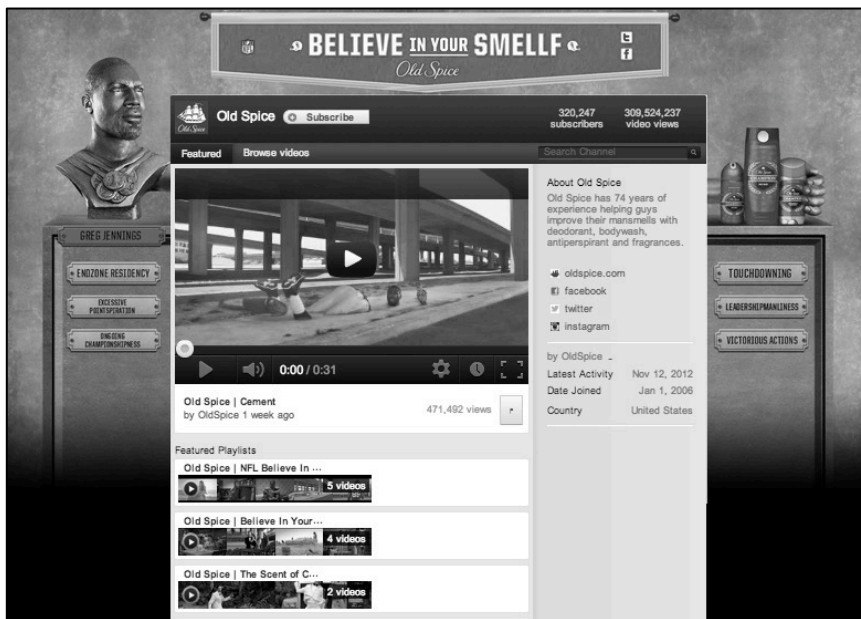


Figure 5: Old Spices' YouTube Channel  
Source: <http://www.youtube.com/user/OldSpice>

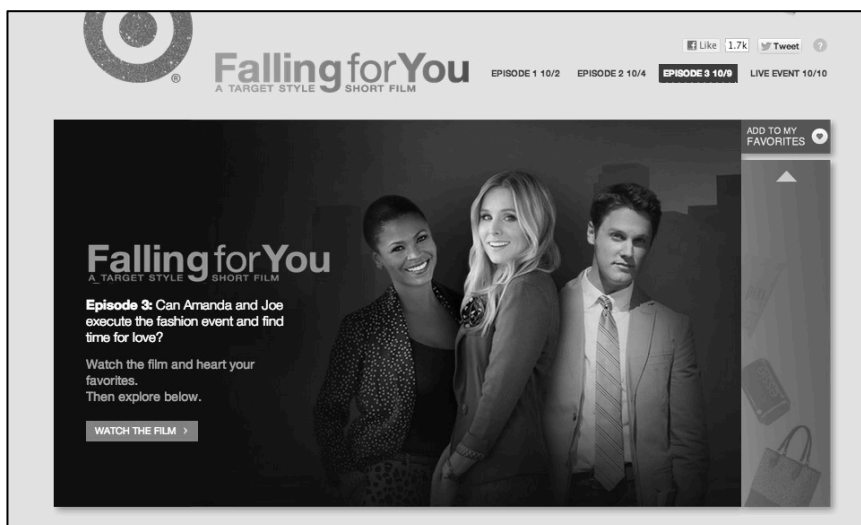


Figure 6: Stars of Target's "Falling for You" Short Film  
Source: <http://fallingforyou.target.com/>



Figure 7: Users Can Purchase Products Directly From the “Falling for You” Video  
Source: <http://fallingforyou.target.com/>

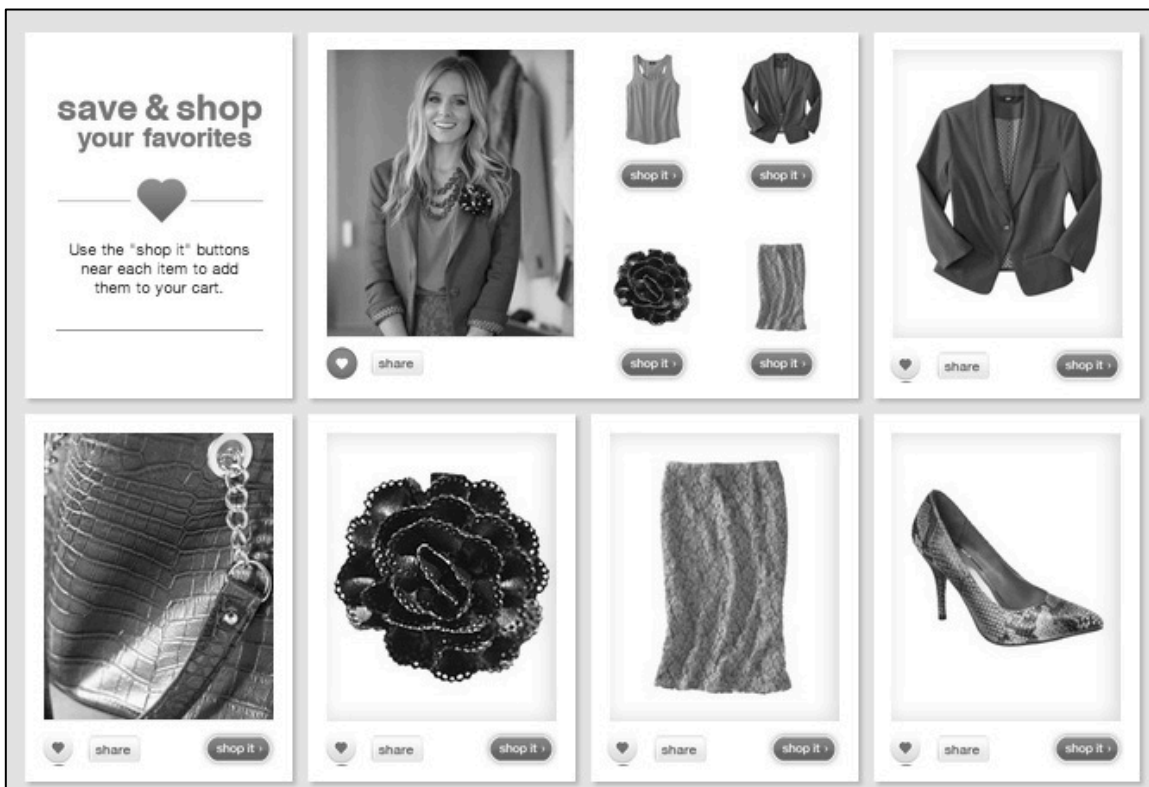


Figure 8: Users Can Save Their Favorite Items From the “Falling for You” Video  
Source: <http://fallingforyou.target.com/>



Figure 9: Expedia's "Tag Me If You Can" YouTube Video.  
Source: Expedia



Figure 10: Expedia's "Tag Me If You Can" Geo-Tagging Function  
Source: <http://www.advertblog.com/2012/08/07/expedia-tag-me-if-you-can>





Figure 11: Expedia's "Tag Me If You Can" Website Post-Contest  
Source: <http://www.expedia.com.au/p/tagme>



Figure 12: Nike+ Fuelband App Screenshot  
 Source: Nike+ Fuelband,  
[http://www.nike.com/us/en\\_us/lp/nikeplusfuelband](http://www.nike.com/us/en_us/lp/nikeplusfuelband)

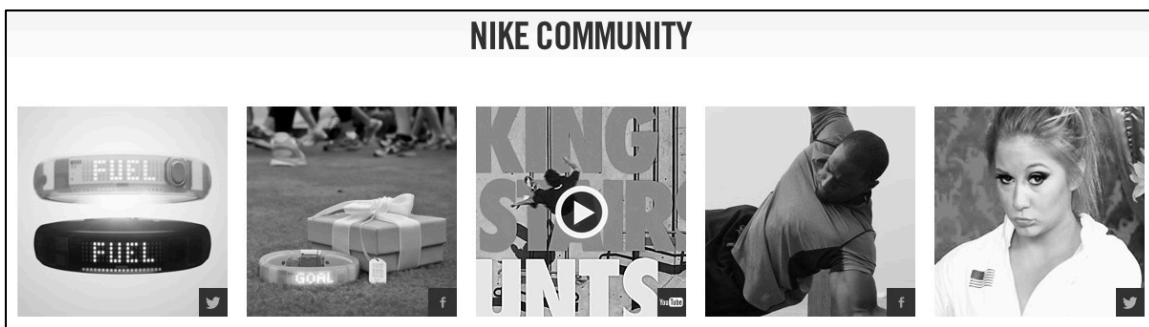


Figure 13: Nike+ Fuelband Social Media Integration  
 Source: Nike+ Fuelband,  
[http://www.nike.com/us/en\\_us/lp/nikeplusfuelband](http://www.nike.com/us/en_us/lp/nikeplusfuelband)



Figure 14: Nike+ Fuelband “Counts” Full-Length Video  
Source: Nike+ Fuelband,  
[http://www.nike.com/us/en\\_us/lp/nikeplusfuelband](http://www.nike.com/us/en_us/lp/nikeplusfuelband)

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